Cryptozoology, 5, 1986, 81–84
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RESULTS OF THE NEW WORLD EXPLORERS SOCIETY HIMALAYAN YETI EXPEDITION

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INTRODUCTION

In February and March, 1986, the New World Explorers Society (NWES) conducted 14 days of on-site fieldwork in the Khumbu region of the Himalayas. The purpose of the expedition was twofold: first, to investigate the possible existence of the unknown animal known to the Sherpas as *yeti*, and, second, to follow up on the investigations conducted by explorer Sir Edmund Hillary and zoologist Marlin Perkins in 1960 in the village of Khumjung.

Because our time was limited, we decided to focus our energies on three strategic locations of Yeti artifacts. These included the Buddhist monasteries in Khumjung, Thyangboche, and Pangboche. A retracing of the 1960 Hillary expedition was attempted, and an extensive interview was conducted with Khumjung village elder Khonjo Khumbi, who had accompanied Sir Edmund and Perkins back to the United States with a supposed Yeti scalp from the Buddhist monastery.

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

The NWES fieldwork was directed primarily by the authors. Assistance during the fieldwork was provided by Leon Childers, Ed Oxley, and Zane Mustaine.

The emphasis on the fieldwork was primarily to obtain information regarding the Yeti from a wide variety of Sherpas, particularly those who had been associated with the 1960 expedition. The initial flight was taken from Katmandu to Lukla. The expedition was met by Khonjo Khumbi's youngest son, Tukten Khumbi. Fifteen Sherpa porters helped in reaching the village of Khumjung. A previous break of the Khumbu glacier had washed out much of the old trail. The new trail consisted of very rough terrain, and was often only 8 to 12 inches in width, with icy and muddy ground; the climb became strenuous.

The expedition arrived in Khumjung, and an interview and overnight stays with Khonjo Khumbi were arranged. Many village Sherpas who claimed some knowledge of the Yeti came to his home, and much discussion took place regarding the Hillary and Perkins presence over 25 years ago. During

the course of interviewing the villagers, we discovered that an elderly Sherpani woman of the village possessed possible Yeti chest hairs. We were told that her son was carrying potatoes along a trail in 1978, and was allegedly attacked by a Yeti. The Yeti was described as a large male, nearly 7 feet tall, and covered with dark and reddish hair. During the course of the attack, the young man took his potato hoe and struck the Yeti across the chest. The Yeti fled into the higher mountain region. The young man struggled back to Khumjung village to his mother, and described his encounter with the Yeti. His wounds were serious, and he later died. This information has been kept confidential for many years by the local Sherpas. Only through much negotiation by Elder Khumbi were we able to obtain a number of hair specimens. These hairs are long, black, and coarse.

Khonjo discussed information on Yeti sightings. He had previously been a trader in Tibet. During trading expeditions, he had observed what he believed were Yeti "furs" in their entirety. He attempted to buy or trade for such a Yeti hide, but was unable to obtain one. The expedition members also examined, at a local Buddhist monastery, the alleged Yeti scalp that was brought to the United States in 1961 by Sir Edmund and Perkins, along with Khonjo. This scalp had been scientifically examined, with the conclusion that it had probably come from a goat hide. However, the villagers stated that the Yeti scalp had been in the monastery for over 100 years, and they still strongly believe that the scalp came from a Yeti.

The expedition team continued to the Thyangboche monastery, in which an audience was given by the High Lama Buddhist. He related seeing numerous Yeti hides—when he was a young man in training in Tibet—in various homes of great hunters. He related stories of the Yeti, including one involving a Yeti coming to a monastery and pounding on the roof and doors. He stated that, when student Lamas go into the mountains to conduct prayer, the Yetis make a shrill sound above the prayers of the student Lamas. This reportedly creates frustration among the young men, and they return to the monastery.

Further information was gathered from local Sherpas regarding attacks on yaks and goats. In one instance, a Sherpa mountain guide allegedly found footprints of a Yeti, and these led to rabbit carcasses in the snow.

The expedition visited the high monastery in Pangboche, at approximately 14,000 feet. The hand and scalp of a supposed Yeti are kept in this monastery. Special permission from the High Lama was obtained for a brief examination of the hand and scalp. Measurements could not be taken, as the Lamas were very reluctant to allow the team to hold the specimens, or to spend much time in the examination. When questioned, they feared we would harm the artifacts. The hand appeared to be very long in regard to finger structure. The scalp was very similar to the one at the Khumjung monastery. While

at this monastery, a local Sherpa came to expedition members indicating that footprints of a Yeti had been observed just the previous day in the base camp region. However, due to difficulties related to the altitude and the lack of supplies, it was decided to end the expedition at this point and return.

The vegetation in the Himalayan alpine areas is restricted to shrubs, rhododendrons, lichens, mosses, dwarf grasses, and cushion plants. Animals include the Himalayan mouse hare, the snow pigeon, and occasionally a pheasant or crow. We observed musk deer at lower elevations. Barren rock and snow was the most common sight in the high areas above 12,000–13,000 feet.

It should be noted that, the more remote and higher the region, the more the Sherpas are convinced of the existence of the Yeti. Someone in nearly every family has reportedly had an encounter with one. They believe there is more than one Yeti, as, on rare occasions, a family of Yeti has been reported.

Results

Although the information gathered from the Sherpas and the Lamas was certainly very interesting and intriguing, it was limited regarding actual sightings of the Yeti. The Yeti is intertwined with the Buddhist religion and culture of the remote Himalayan people. It was very difficult to separate myth from actual sightings and related information.

The hair samples have been submitted to the International Society of Cryptozoology for microscopic analysis.

Future Plans

NWES hopes to conduct further follow-up expeditions to gather additional information, including historical information from local Sherpas and Lamas. As far as we can determine, there do appear to be differences between descriptions of the Yeti and the North American Sasquatch. Yeti descriptions involve a smaller animal, typically not reaching 7 feet in height. Future anatomical comparisons by experts would certainly be helpful and interesting.

(The authors requested publication of the following Addendum, containing additional information, to which the Editor agreed.)

ADDENDUM

Descriptive Information on the Himalayan Yeti, Based on Information Obtained From Local Peoples

(by Marc E. Miller)

Physical Characteristics

Standing height, 5.5–7 feet (165–210 cm); weight, 200–400 lb. (90–180 kg)—size and weight dependent on age and sex; head, covered with hair, except on face and ears; sagittal crest, present; neck, short and thick, and hair-covered; face, hominoid features, dark skin, thin hair growth, wide mouth; trunk, large and muscular, broad chest and shoulders, thick hair growth, no tail; arms, long, reaching knees; fingers, long and extended (the phalanges or bones of the fingers appear to be 14 in number, with three for each finger and two for the thumb, as in humans; three knuckle joints appear to be above the carpus, as in humans); feet, no arch, with four smaller toes and enlargement of the big toe; hair, coarse, long, straight, dense; color, ranging from shades of brown, red, to black on various areas of the body.

Behavioral Characteristics

Calls, variety of shrill noises to howl (occasional reports of growling when threatened); culture, no fire, clothing, weapons, artifacts, art, or agriculture (rocks for defense or offense occasionally reported); habitation, use of caves; diet, omnivorous—roots, berries, bark, rodents, rabbits, birds, wild goat, sheep, deer (occasional attacks on domestic livestock reported); social structure, characterized by family, male-dominant units, with wandering individual males sighted more often; disposition, shy, reclusive, avoiding human contact.

Environmental Characteristics

Habitat, mountain areas, 10,000–20,000 feet in the Himalayan range; interactions, little or no contact with the largest carnivores of the region (Himalayan black bear and snow leopard); enemies, none known except man.

Sources

The above descriptive information was derived from a wide variety of sources, including discussions with Sherpas concerning their insights into the various features of the Yeti. Much of the above is based on assumptions made by the mountain people, as handed down through several generations. The more remote mountain people strongly believe in the Yeti's existence, as embodied in their history and culture, and in modern sightings.